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ABSTRACT

The American family has undergone many changes in the last 20 years, due to divorce, death, or separation of parents, parents who have never married, and mothers who work. To determine how well school reading materials reflect the changing American family, seven basal reader series for grades four, five, and six were studied. Three random family stories from each book were examined. Family situations were categorized as (1) two-parent families, (2) one-parent families, (3) significant adults, and (4) siblings. Instances in which no mention was made of the family and those referring to the mother's working status were also recorded. The results showed that the number of times that many of the family situations were depicted reflected statistics of the population as a whole; however, there was no mention of stepparents, only one mention of the noncustodial parent, and few references to working mothers. (The survey form, a list of basal readers used, and a tally of the surveyed stories are appended.) (HTH)

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THE AMERICAN FAMILY AS SEEN IN
BASAL READERS ON THE
1977 INDIANA STATE ADOPTION LIST

BY
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for E556, Research, Exit Project
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Statement of the Problem

Twenty years ago the family was represented in basal readers as white, Anglo-Saxon, two-parent, middle class with siblings and appropriate pets. This did not typify the true American family. Changes were made in basal readers to include minorities and give women a greater role in the stories. Today's basal readers have reflected minorities and women in leadership roles.

Also over the last twenty years there has been a transition in the American family. Many families were headed by single parents, caused by divorce, death, separation or never married parents. Statistics have stated that forty-five percent of all children will live at least one year of their lives in a single parent home.

It does seem desirable then that textbooks reflect this transition. The State of Indiana has selected seven basal reading series from which each school system must select for classroom use. It would seem desirable for these textbooks to reflect the transitions of the American family.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if the basal readers on the 1977 Indiana State Adoption list represent the American family in a realistic manner. In order to obtain this goal it was necessary to have a definite and workable assessment form. This form was patterned after Dr. Robert J. Kealey's survey of family relationships in second grade basal reading series which was published in the October 1980 issue of *Moment* Magazine.

To limit the study to workable size only fourth, fifth and sixth grade basal readers were used. A random selecting of three contemporary American stories about children from each reader was surveyed.

Review of Literature

A great change has taken place in the American family. There has been an increased incidence of one-parent families. Statistics now show that fifty percent of all divorces involved children. This high incidence of divorce, particularly in the past decade, has produced profound changes in the family and its structure. (Kelly and Wallerstein). Single parent families were also the result of the death of one parent, separation, or of never married parents. A growing number of children have had to endure the loss from the home of a father or a mother, the shock of being uprooted from familiar surroundings, and of being moved to a new neighborhood. The trauma of having lost old friends and of having to make new ones as well as the disappointment of having to discontinue certain activities because of a shortage of money and time has effected many children of divorce. (Damon). Obviously, the schools can not halt the increasing divorce rate. School can not protect children from the pain inflicted by death or divorce. There must be things the schools can do.

It was reported, "that forty-five percent of the infants born in the United States in 1978 will live part of their lives before age eighteen with only one parent." (Clay). In 1978, eighteen and one-half percent of all children under the age of eighteen lived in single parent homes. (Clay). In ten percent of those cases, it was because the child was born before the mother was married; in twenty four percent because of divorce; in five percent because of separation; and in three percent because the mother or father died. (Norton). One out of six school children are now living with only one parent and about one out of eight are living with a remarried parent. Two out of five children born in this

decade will live in single parent families for some part of their childhood. (Damon). Even with these problems, ninety-eight percent of all children will grow up in a family of one style or another. (Solis).

The assumption has been made that these changes in family style constitute a collapse or destruction of family life. It must be recognized that families of the past have never totally conformed to the traditional image of the ideal two-parent family unit. The 19th Century family could achieve economic and social independence if it exerted sufficient effort. Those who could not live up to this standard came to feel inadequate and perhaps guilty. This was not uncommon. Families never were as self sufficient or as self contained as they may have seemed to be in the 19th Century but today they are even less. Especially the economic role of the child in the family has changed. The child no longer has an economic role to provide a feeling of self worth and self esteem. (Solis).

In recent years teachers have become sensitive to racial and sexist references in curriculum materials as well as in their own language. Now there is a need to guard against depicting all families as being made up of a mother, a father, and children. (Hammond).

Several suggestions have been made for the teacher and administrator as to what can be done to help the child of a single parent family. The first mentioned is teacher awareness and sensitivity to the stress these children are going through, especially in the first year following the divorce. (Skeen and McKenry). Kelly and Wallenstein stated, "It is time to formally acknowledge the widespread existence of the divorced family." There is no solace in numbers, but "the devotion, until recently, in curriculum materials to the two-parent, intact family has certainly created a greater sense of aloneness, or differentness, in many children. Classroom teaching that acknowledges and discusses the many variants of family life; one-parent household; father-headed and

mother-headed; remarried families; two-parent families; extended families - makes children feel secure with their own particular family structure." (Kelly and Wallerstein).

Damon states, "America spends its money for children on their medical and educational needs, not on their emotional ones." It has been argued that the school has an obligation to intervene with children of divorce to prevent reactions from being repressed and thus to prevent future disorders. The teacher naturally has the role of interim parent substitute. Teachers are the central figure in the lives of several children in the months following the separation of their parents. In some cases they are the only stable figure in these children's lives. (Skeen and McKenry). School services and curriculum must undergo revisions to better accommodate the newly identified needs of a growing number of children from one-parent families. (Brown).

The Carnegie Council as reported by Solis stated, "We believe that parents are still the world's greatest experts about the needs of their own children. Virtually any private or public program that supports parents, effectively supports children. This principle of supporting family vitality seems to us preferable to any policy that would have the state provide children directly with what it thinks they need."

It is considered important to guard against overly criticizing parents themselves and addressing ourselves to the reform of the institutions that ignore the family's self esteem, or challenge their right to power, equal opportunity and equality. "It seems to matter little whether others in the neighborhood or classroom have also faced divorce," stated Kelly and Wallerstein. Each child struggles alone with the individual meaning of his or her own family disruption, and solace is not to be found in numbers.

Teachers should help children accept the reality of divorce and help them make for themselves the most satisfying lives possible. When administrators

and teachers carefully consider their students, they will find that most, if not all, of the students who have hard times sitting still, have difficulty remembering, appear unmotivated, develop nervous habits, or display inconsistent behavior come from disrupted homes. (Annis and Allers). "We can no longer remove ourselves from our students' emotional traumas by pleading ignorance or lack of training, even though both may well be true," stated Annis and Allers. Teachers must be prepared to deal with their students' dilemmas, for statistics suggest that increasing numbers of students face emotionally draining situations that can, and likely will, block learning. Therefore, administrators and teachers must accept responsibility for developing basic therapy skills. (Annis and Allers).

Curriculum materials have been singled out as a possible source of help for the teacher. Classroom teaching that acknowledges and discusses the many variants of family life, one-parent, remarried, two-parent families, and extended families, can make children feel secure that their own particular family structure is acceptable. (Kelly and Wallerstein). It has been questioned from several sources if this is possible with the current curriculum.

Ricci states that parents have pointed to a series of daily reminders that indicate school/family credibility gaps. He said that school textbooks portray the never-divorced family almost exclusively, school forms are designed for one home with two natural parents. Mother's Day and Father's Day presents are made. Report cards are sent to only one home. Some children feel pushed into divided loyalties and pushed out of step with "real" families.

A survey conducted by the National Committee for Citizens in Education in Columbia, Md. was prompted by complaints from single parents that their children were being treated as though all school children have two parents. One major point of the survey was that only eight percent of the single parents in the survey said their children's textbooks contained any family type other than a

two-parent family. They felt this was discrimination. The textbook two-parent environment was shown as "normal." They complained that this contributed to the child's sense of "being out of it." (McCormack).

Based on the growing number of single parent family units and the apparent desire of single parents to have their family unit considered normal, it seems appropriate for the school curriculum to consider a spectrum of family units that are broad and inclusive, and not exclusive or value laden.

Teachers and administrators should be made aware of the models of family presented in basal readers. These stories are communicating values to students. The school faculty must examine the stories to determine if these values agree or disagree with the school's philosophy. (Kealey).. Single parents participating in a survey criticized the curriculum materials which their children used, saying that it discriminated against their type of "family." Only the textbook two-parent environment is shown as "normal." (Clay). Over thirty percent of the parents surveyed didn't know if their children's textbooks showed a variety of family types or not. "This lack of awareness on the part of parents is unfortunate," Clay said in her report, "Since such awareness is the first step toward needed changes. Publishers aren't likely to make needed changes on their own. If parents and school personnel want various family configurations displayed, they will have to let publishers know."

Dr. Kealey stated that values may be acquired through what one reads. Answers to questions about the world and human relations are perceived in the literature read. From reading the content of basal stories the individual receives new ideas and images. A reading student can be said to live vicariously in the lives of the many people from many other times and places that he has read about. He also lives through the stories he reads about contemporary modern life. Written material enables the pupil to learn cognitively about his world. Reading also should help the person grow effectively. Since reading is

an active process, the reader must react to the material presented. Joy and sorrow, peace or rebellion, love or hate, success or failure, courage or cowardice are all depicted and experienced by the reader. (Kealey).

All family styles in the basal readers should show a strong, caring relationship among all the members of the family. Each individual in the family should be concerned about and help the other family members. A two-parent family should serve as a role model. So should one-parent families. Different family styles may be seen as an alternate mode of family life to the one the student is personally experiencing. Upmost, the teacher should emphasize the caring relationship that exists among the members of the various family units. (Kealey).

By including various family styles, one is increasing the child's ability to cope with life. The experience of divorce, while generally is a traumatic one for the child, need not be tragic. With proper direction, the divorce experience can contribute to the child's ability to cope with life and cope with divorce. (Bredeholf).

Once values have been acknowledged, the sensitive teacher can do much to develop those values through the judicious selection and discussion of family stories in the basal reader. The question then has arisen, are families and various family styles represented in the basal readers so that the teacher can use them for a guide?

Method of Measurement

In order to have definite and workable guidelines for evaluating the basal readers, an assessment form was devised. It was patterned after Dr. Robert J. Kealey's survey of family relationships in second grade basal readers which was published in October 1980 in Momentum Magazine.

All seven basal series of the 1977 Adoption in Reading by the Commission on Textbook Adoption by the Indiana State Board of Education were used. Grades four, five, and six were selected because their stories usually contain more content and have the potential for describing the family situation more fully.

Each basal reader in each series was surveyed to first find those stories relating to families. Only contemporary stories about children which appeared to be fictitious were used. All animal stories, poetry, biography, and historical stories were not considered.

After the family stories were listed, a random selection of three stories from each book was formally surveyed. A table of random numbers from Burlington and May was used to select the stories that were formally surveyed.

The assessment form included five main categories; two-parent families; one-parent families; significant adults; situations involving significant others; and number of siblings. A category for no mention of family status was also included when it was discovered that some contemporary stories about children do not make any reference to a family. Since working mothers have become so prevalent it was decided to tally if the mothers mentioned were said to be working or not. An unknown work status category was also included.

Custodial relatives were included in significant adults as well as babysitters, teachers, and religious leaders. Non-custodial relatives were originally included in the significant adults category but later included with the extended family in the significant others category. In the significant others situations, the mention of parental divorce; the mention of any divorce, parental remarriage or any remarriage; the mention of step parents; the mention of foster parents or children; the mention of adoption; and the mention of never married parents were included.

It was felt significant to see what relationship to siblings was represented in the stories so this category was included.

The assessment form also included space to indicate if the reference was found in pictures or text, but the data was expected to be compiled only as referenced to the category.

Definition of Terms

Extended Family: all members of the main characters family not living in the home such as grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, or other blood relatives..

Contemporary Story about Children: any story in a basal reader that is about a child that appears to be living in the United States during the present time. This could include American Indians and inhabitants of Alaska and Hawaii as well as ethnics who now reside in the United States.

One-Parent Family: a group of people including one parent and his/her children and relatives where appropriate. Because of divorce, seperation, death, or having never married, there is only one parent heading the family.

Limitations of the Study

The most obvious limitation was that in a study of this type, it was bound to include a certain degree of subjectivity. Every effort was made to keep the survey as objective as possible. The selection of the stories as contemporary, fictitious stories about children was completely determined by the surveyor. The various categories could then have been completed quite objectively.

It was also hoped to include a comparison of the books on the adoption list and the latest editions available since some of the editions used date to 1975. Only one publisher responded with his latest edition and it was only a partial shipment. With just one publisher responding, it was decided not to do this comparison.

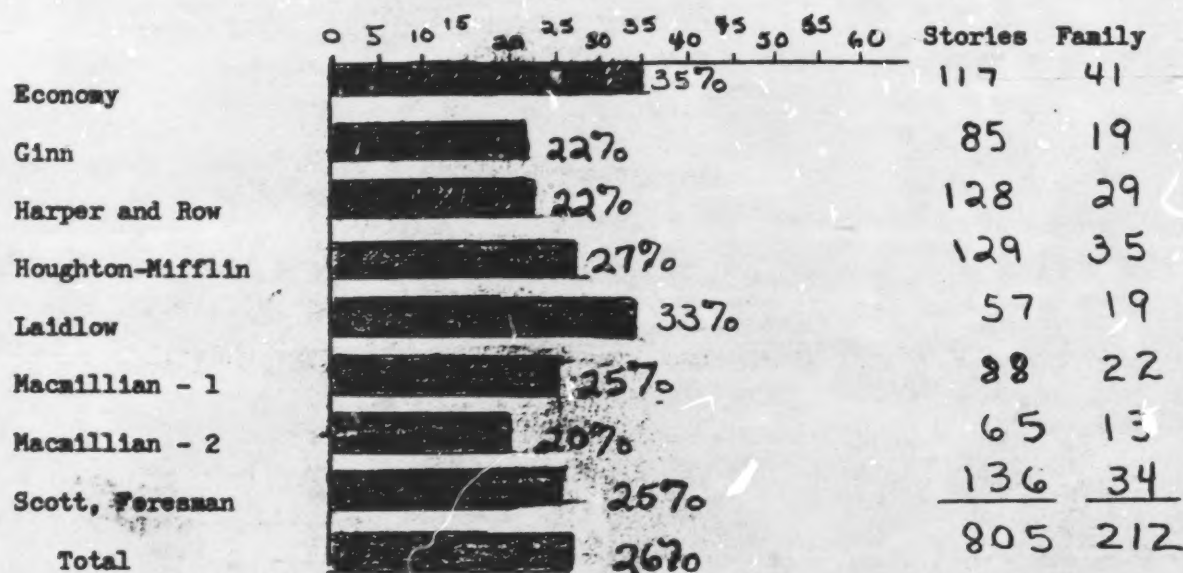
This study did not include supplemental material such as workbooks or expansion books. These books most likely make reference to the family, but it was decided not to include them because of the unavailability of all the supplementary books.

Presentation of the Data

A total of sixty nine stories from seven basal reader series were surveyed. A random sample of three stories from each fourth, fifth, and sixth grade book was used.

It was surprising to learn how few of the stories in basal readers dealt with the family.

FIGURE I



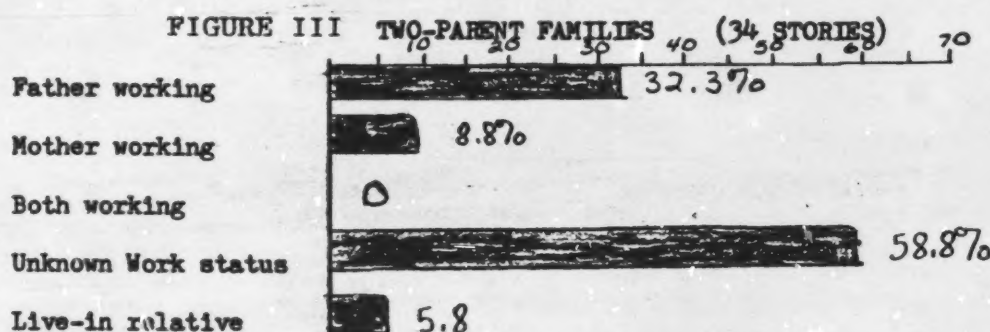
Of the total number of stories, 805, and the total number of family stories, 212, only twenty-six percent have dealt with contemporary children in any manner.

FIGURE II

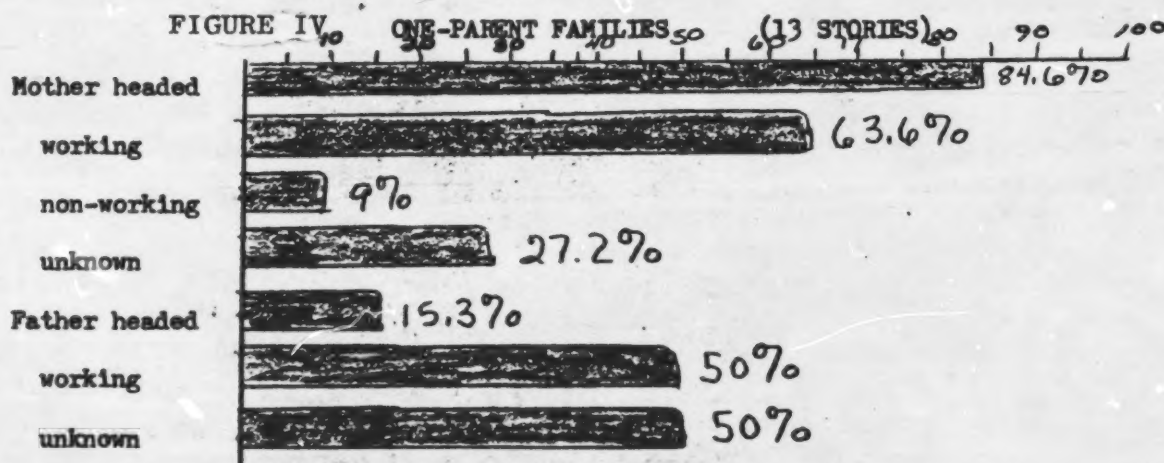


It is assumed that the authors of the basal series merely ignored the family status in the 23.2% of the stories where no mention was made of the family status.

In the two-parent families, out of thirty four families mentioned, eleven have the father working, three have both parents working, none have just the mother working, and twenty left the parental occupation unmentioned. In the two-parent families there were two mentions of live-in relatives.



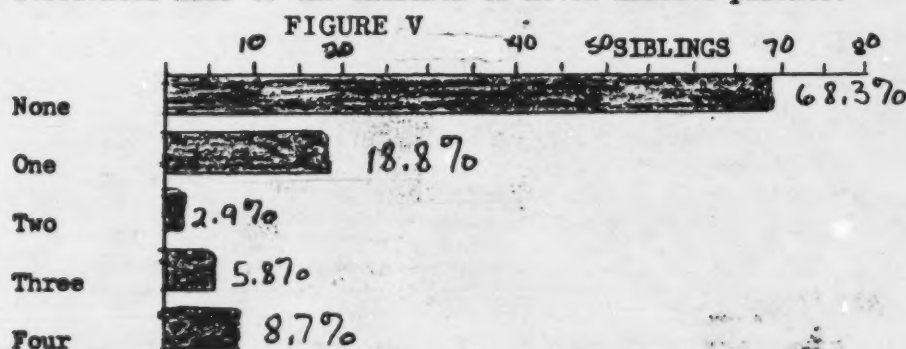
In the one-parent families, eleven were headed by women and two by men for a total of thirteen stories. In the mother headed families, seven were working, one was specifically mentioned as non-working, and three had unknown work status. In the two father headed families, one was working and one was of unknown work status. In both mother and father headed families there was no mention of live-in relatives.



In the category of significant adults, custodial relatives are mentioned six times. These included an aunt and uncle, four references to grandmothers, and two references to grandfathers. The aunt and uncle were in the same story and in one of the grandparent references both grandmother and grandfather were mentioned. This created a two adult custodial situation. The other references were to single custodial relatives.

Teachers play a large role as significant adults in the stories surveyed. In ten of the stories surveyed a teacher is mentioned and one mentions a principal. A babysitter or someone providing childcare is mentioned in three stories. In one story the child characters are the baby sitters but were not included in this category because they are not adults. References to religious leaders were made only once, and this was an American Indian Medicine Man.

In family situations, the extended family is mentioned seventeen times or twenty-seven and one-half percent of the stories. Parental death is mentioned twice. Parental divorce was mentioned only once in the sixty nine stories. This story dealt directly to a child's reaction to his parents divorce. There were no mentions of other divorces, parental remarriage, any remarriage by others, or of step parents. One story mentioned foster parents and their foster child. The story dealing with divorce mentioned adoption of another child but not the main character in the story. There were never any references made to the children of never married parents.



The sibling category of none also includes those stories where siblings were merely not mentioned.

Summary

Have the basal reader series that were surveyed indicated the publishers were aware of the transitions being made in the American family? Have they reflected this change in their choice of stories?

A large percentage of the stories in basal readers have nothing to do with the family. They cover history, science, fantasy, and animal stories. Only twenty-six percent of the stories in the basal readers were about contemporary children.

The survey did reflect a broad variety of stories about almost all types of families and family situations. Families were represented to be of many different ethnic origins. The family relationship was always portrayed as a loving and caring relationship even when conflict was the central theme of the story. A significant percentage of the stories about children made no reference to the main character's family.

Children learn not only cognitively from what they read, but also affectively. From the stories presented, it would appear possible for a child to feel positive about his family situation. He will interject his own feelings into an unspecified family situation.

Conclusions

It is the conclusion of this research that in the stories involving family situations there was a variety of family types depicted. Many of these depictions, when compared to society as a whole, did reflect current statistics.

In the general population of the United States, ninety-eight percent of all children live in some form of family situation. (Solis). Of the stories surveyed, 76.8% show a relationship between a child and some form of family. In Kealey's study the relationship was 76%. This can be considered a relationship between the two studies, but not a relationship to the population. One possible reason for this difference lies in the other 23% of the stories where no family relationship is mentioned. The family relationship is most likely ignored as irrelevant to the story. In these stories the reader may fantasize about the family situation of the child, even interjecting the family situation most appealing to the reader.

Only 17% of the general population of children live with one parent. It has been speculated that the census of 1980 may show 4% living in single-parent homes. (Kealey). Norton projects 2% by 1990. In the survey there were 18.8% of the stories about single parent families, 8.7% about custodial relationships, and 23.2% were of unknown family relationship. This correlates rather closely between the general population and basal readers.

Clay stated that 90% of one-parent families were headed by women. In the survey, of the thirteen stories represented as having single parent families, eleven were mother headed and two were father headed for 18.8% of the stories. There was a correlation between the basal readers and general population.

Step parents are never mentioned in the survey, yet nine percent of all

children in 1960 and ten percent of all children in 1978 lived with a natural parent and a stepparent. (Norton).

Over fifty percent of the women in the United States work. Over half of all school children have mothers who work outside the home. (Damon). In the survey of stories, only 14.5% of the stories made mention of working mothers. In the mother headed families, 63.6% show working mothers, 9.1% were not working, and 27.3% were of unknown work status. Weiss stated that 55% of American women who were single parents were working, 12% were laid off or looking for work, for a total of 68%. Far more women are working than the basal readers represent.

While nearly twenty percent of school age children live with only one parent, the other parent is of concern to the child. Only one story mentioned the non-custodial parent. This failure to mention the non-custodial may be because it was not important to the story or was purposely omitted. A child can not purposely neglect his other parent especially when support or visitation rights are involved.

Because of the mobility of the transitional American family many children do not have a relationship with their extended family. Of the surveyed stories 27.5% mentioned the extended family. Custodial others, which included extended family, was only mentioned in 10.1% of the stories.

In the survey, only 32.2% of the children mentioned have any siblings. The fact that 63.8% of the stories did not mention siblings does not seem to be true to the general population. Kealey's survey found 40% of the children in his survey to have siblings. There was a fairly close comparison here. Again siblings may not have been considered relevant to the story. Siblings however, are very important to the child.

All of the family stories surveyed did show the family in a caring and loving situation and relationship. Even when there was conflict, the conflict

was resolved to show love and understanding. This may not be totally realistic.

Of the stories surveyed, 2.9% mentioned parental death. In the general population 2.7% of the single parent homes are the result of parental death. (Norton).

Recommendations

The basal reader series have done much to present the family in various forms. We no longer see only the two-parent, white, middle class family with two children and pets living on a tree lined suburban street. Father no longer goes off to work and leaves an apron-clad mother at home to bake cookies and await the arrival of her children from school. Yet only 14% of women are shown as working when in actuality the figure should be closer to 50%. More working mothers in two-parent families need to be shown in the basal reader series.

Basal readers should continue to show one-parent families in the percentage now shown. A basal reader with several single-parent families would be desirable. A good teacher will show through these stories that single-parent families can be fine places to grow up.

Characters in children's reading should serve as role models especially if the reader lacks role models at home. The characters should not be stereotyped as has been seen in grandparents and siblings. Older siblings should be presented as worthy of emulating.

These single parent families represent an alternative life style some children are unaware of. It will give them a broader perspective. Some stories need to have the family situation as an unknown, so the child can interject his life style or a life style he finds desirable.

Caring relationships between family members are an important aspect of family life and should remain in the basal reader. A caring teacher will build on these stories to help increase their value not only in the teaching of reading but also in the teaching of values.

Certain family situations such as death and never married parents may need to be left to the trade books as they deal with sensitive areas teachers may not be allowed to cover.

All schools selecting a basal reader series should look to how the stories reflect the family and pick that series which best represents the family in transition.

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SURVEY OF BASAL READERS

Publisher _____ Date _____

Title of Book _____ Grade _____

of pages _____ # of stories _____ # of family stories _____

Title of story _____ pages _____

references to: text picture

two parent family:

- father working
- mother working
- both working
- unknown
- live in relative

one parent family:

- mother head:
 - working
 - non-working
 - unknown
- live in relative
- father head:
 - working
 - non-working
 - unknown
- live in relative

significant adults:

- aunt: custodial
 - non custodial
- uncle: custodial
 - non custodial
- gr'mother: custodial
 - non custodial
- gr' father: custodial
 - non custodial
- babysitter
- teacher
- religious leader

situations:

- extended family
- parental death
- parental divorce
- any divorce
- parental remarriage
- any remarriage
- step parent: mother
 - father
- foster parent
- foster child
- adoption
- never married parent

of siblings:

- none
- one
- two
- three
- four or more

List of Books Used

Grade 4

The Economy Co.
Ginn and Company
Harper & Row Publishers
Houghton Mifflin Co.
Laidlaw Brothers
Macmillan Inc.

Scott Foresman and Co.

Silver Twist
A Lizard to Start With
Dreams and Dragons
Medley
Baskets and Balloons
Growing/Pastimes/Messages
Cycles/Impressions/A Visit with Rosalind
Flying Hoofs

Grade 5

The Economy Co.
Ginn and Company
Harper & Row Publishers
Houghton Mifflin Co.
Laidlaw Brothers
Macmillan Inc.

Scott Foresman and Co.

Cinnamon Peaks
Tell Me How the Sun Rose
Moccasins and Marvels
Keystone
Patterns
Moments/Birds and Beasts/Signals
Wonders/Outlets/The Moonball
Fins and Tales

Grade 6

The Economy Co.
Ginn and Company
Harper & Row Publishers
Houghton Mifflin Co.
Macmillan Inc.

Scott Foresman and Co.

Lavender Skywriters
Measure Me, Sky
Time and Tigers
Impressions
Awakening/Journeys/Dialogues
Inroads/Expressions/A Horse Came Running
Racing Stripes

Tally of Surveyed Stories

Two-Parent family	34
father working	11
mother working	0
both working	3
unknown	20
live-in relative	2
One-Parent family	13
mother head	11
working	7
non-working	1
unknown	3
live-in relative	0
father head	2
working	1
non-working	0
unknown	1
live-in relative	0
Other Situations Mentioned	
aunt-custodial	1
aunt-non-custodial	2
uncle-custodial	1
uncle-non-custodial	1
grandmother-custodial	4
grandmother-non-custodial	1
grandfather-custodial	2
grandfather-non-custodial	1
babysitter	3
teacher	11
religious leader	1
extended family	12
parental death	2
parental divorce	1
other parent (non custodial)	0
any divorce	0
parental remarriage	0
any remarriage	0
step parent - mother	0
step parent - father	0
foster parent	1
foster child	1
adoption	1
never married parent	0
custodial sibling	1